For the Love of God
REAP: Genesis 22
Dr. David Platt
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With faith in this Word, if you have a Bible and I hope you do, or if somebody else around you does that you can look on, let me invite you to open it with me to Genesis chapter 22. It's the first book in the Bible, chapter 22. And then let me also invite you to pull out the worship guide that hopefully you received when you came in; and in that worship guide there are some notes that will guide our time in the Word this morning.

In case you're visiting with us or a member that's missed out the last couple weeks, we're walking through a journey over the next two years where we're reading a couple of chapters a day, and over the next two years we'll be through the Old Testament once, New Testament and Psalms twice. You can find that Bible reading plan online; you can pick it up when you leave too, but it's online at Brookhills.org.

But as we're reading through the Bible together, part of our purpose is to help one another know how to read the Bible, how to study the Bible, how to experience all that God has designed for us in the Bible on a daily basis. So at the beginning of this year we gave out a "Simple Guide to Personal Worship" that, again, you can download online as well from the church website. But it was developed to help you think through, "Okay, when I sit down with the Bible before God alone, what do I do? Where do I start?"

And I mentioned when I gave that out that we would be unpacking that guide at different points in the coming weeks. And a couple weeks ago we thought together, specifically, about our time in prayer. We looked at that acrostic—PRAY: Praise, Repent, Ask, and Yield—and we thought together about what it looks like to pray—to spend time alone with God praying. Where do you start? What do you do?

So I want us to do a similar thing this morning with Bible reading and study. This is one of those areas, much like prayer, where I think we just assume that everybody else knows how to do this and everybody else knows what this looks like on a daily basis, when the reality is: many of us don't know how to do this. We don't know how to read, how to study the Bible, and as a result we don't do this on a daily basis. Or we do it, maybe we read, but we've got this sense that we're not really experiencing all that God has designed for us—the delight that God has prepared for us in it.

So what I want us to do this morning is to read through a chapter of the Bible together, and we're going to do some audience participation, much like we've done in previous weeks … so no spectators here. We're going to work through some things, and even if you're not a Christian, we are glad you're here—whether you're here to appease a friend or family member who keeps inviting you, or you're just on a journey in your spiritual life, or you're exploring Christianity, we invite you to study the Bible with us this morning. Even if you don't necessarily believe the Bible is God's Word, you at least have to admit that this is one of the most timeless books in all of history, if not the most timeless book in all of history. So it will be valuable just to ask, "What does it teach? What is it saying?"

So we're going to dive into the Word this morning. We're going to take—from that "Simple Guide to Personal Worship"—an acrostic for Bible study called REAP: Read, Examine, Apply, Pray.

If you look at the notes that are in your worship guide, you'll see that acrostic there. So we're going to take Genesis 22, and I want you, this morning, to get maybe a taste of what reading and studying the Bible might look like on a daily basis in your life.

Now in order to do this together, we've got to put aside all the reasons people give for why we don't study the Bible. So some people, even Christians, say, "Well, I'm not a pastor. I mean, isn't that what your job is to do, David?" It is a part of my job. If I'm going to preach God's Word to you on a weekly basis, then I need to know what God's Word says. But the beauty of the Bible is that it's accessible not just to the theologically trained pastor; it's accessible to every man, woman, boy, and girl who has a relationship with God.

This is part of the magnificence of the Reformation centuries ago—really going back before then. So here's a little history aside that I think is worth it. We're indebted in this room. Obviously God, author of Scripture, has given us this book. But then around 400 A.D., a guy named Jerome translated the Bible into Latin—what was called the Vulgate. The reason I share that is because centuries after that, a guy named John Wycliffe came along and was the first to translate the Bible into English. He took Jerome's Latin version and translated it word for word into English. He was accused of being a heretic for wanting to take the Bible and make it available in the language of ordinary people, not just ordained clergy. And even those who received this translation of the Bible would experience persecution for reading it. So Wycliffe was persecuted, those who were reading the Bible were persecuted.

Then along came William Tyndale. Tyndale followed in Wycliffe's footsteps about 200 years later with the first English New Testament based on the Greek instead of the Latin. He attempted to complete the Old Testament, but in 1536 Tyndale was executed, and his body was burned. All because of his commitment to make the Bible as accessible as possible to as many people as possible. In his words, he wanted to "make the boy that drives the plow in England know more of Scripture than any scholar." Tyndale's associate, John Rogers, completed Tyndale's work in the next two years, and Rogers was martyred as well.

So I want us to realize that even the translation we have in our hands is the fruit of men and women in the past who have literally given their lives that the Bible might be accessible. In a way, this drives us even more, when we think about people groups for which there is no translated Scripture in their language, to work toward that. The Bible is available to us in such a way that the Bible is not designed for study by pastors only.

Other people say, "Well, I just don't have time to study the Bible. I work a however-many-hour work week. I've got the kids all day long. I can't find ten minutes to myself and even if I did have ten minutes I would have no energy in it." I'm guessing that we can all, in some way, identify with that in this room. We are a busy people. And that's valid, but it leads us to the realization: In order for Bible study to be a reality in our lives, Bible study must be a priority in our lives.

And that's really the question—what place or priority is reading and studying the Word of God going to have in your life? Because it will be easily drowned out by all kinds of things in your life, in my life, and in the world around us. I want to urge you today to make it a priority. And not to prioritize because you *have* to, but because you *want* to. So part of my goal this morning is to help you see the treasure that's just waiting to be discovered in this

Word so you'll want it. I want you to taste it a little bit this morning in a way that you'll want a little bit more. And once you taste more, you'll want more and more.

People ask me sometimes, "How do I grow in my hunger, my desire, for God's Word?" And I think it's clear. The way to grow in your hunger and your desire for God's Word is to read the Word. I've illustrated it before. The first time I went over to Heather's house, my wife, when I was just getting to know her and I was invited over to her house to have dinner with her family, I got there and they served seafood. Heather's family loves seafood. I grew up in a family where we never ate seafood. My dad hated seafood, so I didn't like seafood either.

So they served seafood, and they asked, "Well, David, do you like seafood?"

And I wanted to impress this girl. I wanted to say 'I can't stand what you're putting in front of me' to her parents. So I said, "Oh yeah, sure." So I start eating the seafood, and it didn't taste good, but I said, "Well, this is great. Interesting. Yeah." So I started acting like I liked it.

Well, the problem was, they bought it. So subsequent visits over at her house, "David loves seafood! Let's have seafood tonight; David is coming over. Oh, yes, of course."

I started going on vacation with them down to the beach. They'd say, "David, what's your favorite seafood restaurant on the beach?"

"Ahh, they're all great ... seafood ... restaurants." Inside, I'm thinking, 'Is there a burger somewhere?' But I'd just eat seafood with Heather's family all the time, to the point where, now, I love seafood. I eat seafood all the time now, by choice!

Now I'm not saying that the Word is miserable food that you've got to learn to acquire a taste for, but what I am saying is once you taste a little bit it will begin to change your appetite.

Don't be surprised if you don't have a hunger for God's Word when you fill your mind with the Internet, TV, movies, Twitter, and whatever else. If you're constantly filling your mind with that, and you're not filling your mind with the Word, don't be surprised that you don't have a hunger for God's Word. If you start filling your mind with God's Word, the appetite grows. And you begin to realize, "This is better than all of that other stuff put together." So you start to crave it. First Peter 2:2, *"Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation."*

I was putting our one-year-old to bed last night and pulled out a bottle. As soon as I pull out that before-bed bottle, he goes into hyper-overdrive. It's as if he's saying, "Give it to me!" It's like he hasn't had anything all day long. He just grabs it and sucks it down.

And that's my prayer for us in the Word, yes, on a week-by-week basis when we gather in here, but for you and me to experience this on a day-by-day basis and in the process realize Psalm 19:7-11 is true.

> *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much*

fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. (Psalm 19:7-12)

Read

So let's uncover great reward. We're going to read Genesis 22 together. Now as we read, I want to encourage you in the way you read Scripture. In the "Simple Guide to Personal Worship" I encouraged you to read the Bible slowly, carefully, prayerfully, thoughtfully, humbly, and joyfully.

So read the Word slowly; the goal is not to see how fast you can get it done.

Read it thoughtfully; it's not mindless activity. We want to see, we want to imagine, we want to understand what's going on in the text. And this takes work. Mark it down: The Bible will not yield its fruit to the lazy. It takes thoughtful diligence; we need to engage our mind in the Word.

And learning to understand the Bible is not something that just happens overnight. It continually grows—the more we read and the more we study the Bible, the more we will grow in it. We miss this. Someone will become a Christian, we'll hand them a Bible and say, "Go for it," and 30 years later they still don't know how to study the Bible. This is tragic. And I don't want that to be the case for you—for any one of us in this room.

I want to help us to understand and read it thoughtfully and carefully. Bible study's a journey and we have to be careful where we step because there are a lot of difficult issues that we encounter along the way.

We've already come across some difficult texts in reading, especially through Genesis, and they'll just get more difficult. Like, what do you do when you get to Leviticus 19:19 and it says you should not wear a garment made of two types of material? Is that to make us say, "Alright, I'm getting rid of everything that's not 100% cotton?" Is that the step you're going to take? A couple of weeks ago, we read about Peter walking on water in Matthew chapter 14. Does this mean you need to go out to the lake or a pool somewhere and just try it, to see if you really have faith?

I've mentioned before the story—I won't tell all the details—of when I was trying out for the 8th grade basketball team—does anyone remember this story? And I wanted to try to think of how could I impress the coach as the shortest kid in the 8th grade—a four-foot-nothing runt. I'm thinking, "How can I impress the coach and convince him to put me on the team?" So, as I was reading the Bible one day, I came to Luke 1:37, which says nothing is impossible with God, and I just concluded, "Okay. Well that's my answer. If nothing is impossible with God then that means I could dunk the basketball. And if I could dunk the basketball, the coach would have to put me on the team.

So I remember—unfortunately, a totally true story—I left my Bible sitting there, I went outside my house, I got a basketball and went to the back of the driveway. And I said, "Lord, I believe with your power I can dunk this basketball. You said it in your Word, so I believe I can do this." And I planned out how many steps it was going to take for me to get

from the back of the driveway up to the goal. My plan was: when I was two feet away I was going to close my eyes.

So, follow with me here. I was going to close my eyes, take the last two steps with my eyes closed, and jump with my eyes closed. That way I could picture angels lifting me up to the goal. And my plan was, when I got up to the goal, I was obviously going to throw the ball through the rim, and then I was going to hang there for a while because I've never been up there before. So I had it all planned out. Totally true story. I wish there was exaggeration to this story. There's not. No exaggeration. I got down on my knees and I started praying, "Lord, you said in your Word nothing's impossible with you." People were driving by, a normal day for them … I was having a revival, right there in the driveway.

I got up off my knees in prayer and I started running. I had the ball in my hand—every step planned out. I got two feet away. I closed my eyes, take the last two steps with my eyes closed ,and I jumped. I could picture—I could feel—angels on the left and right. The next thing I felt was that basketball pole right in my forehead. Just imagine walking by my house on that day. You would have seen a kid get up off his knees, supposedly in prayer, and then go running, and jump into a basketball pole.

So go to Luke 1:37, and you'll see this has nothing to do with making the 8th grade basketball team when it says nothing is impossible with God. This is the virgin birth of the Son of God. That's very different. So we need to be careful that we don't just read the Bible and quickly jump to what it means for us. We need to read the Bible thoughtfully and carefully.

We also need to read the Bible prayerfully. At this point I just want to remind you—you never study the Bible alone. Never. You say, "Wait a minute. I thought we were supposed to go in our room, close the door, and pray to our Father who's unseen" (Matthew 6:6).

Exactly. God has given us, not only the gift of his Word, but the gift of his Spirit. Christian, you have the Spirit of God in you, with you, whenever you open this Word, to open your eyes to understand it. This is communion with God as you're reading His Word. Bible study is a supernatural activity, a divine encounter with the Word of God through the Spirit of God. This is an awesome thought.

Which leads us to read this text humbly. We're not reading this Book like we read any other book in the world. This Book has authority in our lives. We're not coming to this Book like some self-help book, where we're looking for options to consider in our lives. We are not looking for options to consider in this Word—we're looking for commands to obey. And in that sense, every day when we open up this Word, it's like we're putting a blank check on the table again, with our lives, in a fresh way, saying, "Whatever you say, I'll do. Whatever you lead me to do..."

We do this because we trust God. We trust that God knows what is best for us, and that leads to the joy that's found in the Word. Because we know that what God has for us is better than what we would have for ourselves. We know there's greater joy to be found in him and in relationship with him than in anyone or anything else this world has to offer us.

And this is the danger of never learning to study the Bible on our own, which so many Christians, tragically, never learn to do. And as a result, their entire spiritual life is lived by proxy, through somebody else. Maybe a Christian comes every single Sunday to hear the Word preached by someone else. This is obviously not bad in and of itself; Scripture is clear that there's a place for that. But you don't fall in love with someone by proxy. You don't fall

in love with your spouse through another person. You don't love your spouse through someone else, by proxy. You fall in love with someone directly, personally, in intimacy with that person.

And I am zealous for you not just to know God through sermons here on Sunday. I'm zealous for you to read this Book every day. It's why we're reading through the Bible together, because I'm convinced that when you do, you will fall in love with the Author of this Book, and you will find true life under the authority of this Book. I'm convinced of it. Which is why I'm praying for no spectators in here—when it comes to the members of this church especially—as we're reading through the Bible. Don't just say, "I think we're talking about that but I'm not really doing it." Let's do this. Let's know God, commune with God, see what God does.

Alight, Genesis chapter 22. In light of that, let's read it slowly, carefully, thoughtfully, humbly, joyfully, and prayerfully.

Let me pray.

Dear God, O God, we realize that you are Lord over the universe, the creator of everything and the sustainer of everything. We know that our hearts are beating in this room right now only because you are giving them rhythm … and you're doing it for seven billion people at the same time. You're King over all creation, the God who spoke a word and the world came into being. And yet, even in light of your grandeur, you are with us now. We are awed by that, O God. We're awed by the fact that your presence is with us in this room, that you've given us your Word, and that you are about to speak to us individually through it. And so we say yes, yes, yes, yes—speak to us. Speak to us, O God. We don't treat this casually or tritely.

We want to hear from you, God, and we want your Word and its powerful effects to take place in our minds, in our hearts, in our lives … in ways that have eternal ramifications as a result of the next few moments in this room. I pray for non-Christians who are here, that as we read your Word, your Spirit would open the eyes of hearts to see your love, and that people today would trust in you for the first time. And for your sons and daughters all across this room that have the Spirit of God in us, your Spirit in us, we pray that you would illumine our minds right now to understand what you have said and, consequently, what you are saying to us. I want to hear from you. In Jesus' name we pray these things with great anticipation. Amen.

So that's where I encourage you to start. That's where I start my time in the Word in the mornings, even with just a short prayer: "Lord, I want to hear from you." So, "Lord, we want to hear from you."

Genesis 22, verse one:

> *After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and*

come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

Now after these things it was told to Abraham, "Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: Uz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel." (Bethuel fathered Rebekah.) These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reumah, bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah. (Genesis 22)

Alright. Read—that's the first letter.

And quick side note here—we're not going to spend time here right now like we've done in the past with passages like 1 Corinthians 13, and like we'll do in the future—memorize. So I want to encourage you, during reading during the week, a couple chapters a day, to look for maybe a verse a week to memorize. That's one of my goals in my personal disciple-making plan—to memorize one verse a week out of the chapters that we're reading—to at least start there.

So I want to encourage you to do that. As you come across a verse … look for verses that really stick out and say, "I'm going to memorize that." Maybe short, maybe long, maybe a couple of verses. You'll see on the front of the worship guide every week is a proposed memory verse. So from this last week, Genesis 2:17-18 is on there, so if that would help, then feel free to use that. Or if there's another one that sticks out particularly to you, let me encourage you to memorize and to build that into your Bible reading. "Your Word have I

hidden in my heart," (Psalm 119:11) so hide it. Lodge it there in a way that just reading doesn't do. Memorizing lodges it deeper.

And you might think, "Well, I just don't have the ability to memorize. I can't memorize." I hear that all the time. And I know different people have different abilities to memorize, so there's no question about that. But we've mentioned before, if I were to tell you today I'd give you a thousand dollars for every verse you could memorize, you'd learn—today—to memorize. So this Word is better than gold, and much fine gold, Psalm 19 says (verse 10).

So, store it away in your heart. Spend time. Have some kind of intentionality in memorizing and have other people help you. I'll spend time memorizing, and then I've got other people that I'll share it with, saying, "Okay, here's what I've memorized," and "Help me to remember this," and that sort of thing. So let me encourage you to make it a priority to memorize.

Examine

So, Read, then … Examine. Examine the text. Do we want to understand what Genesis 22 is saying? I mentioned that we need to read the Bible carefully. So that's why I want to give you some cautions because this is where even well-meaning believers can go awry in Bible study really quickly. If we're not careful, we can approach the Bible in unhealthy ways, asking unhelpful questions. So for example, we can take a pretty superficial approach to the Bible, read a text like Genesis 22, and then ask, "Okay, what does this chapter mean to me?" Probably the most common mistake in studying the Bible is to read and then ask, "Okay, what does this mean to me?"

This happens all the time in small group Bible studies. People sitting around a room will read a verse or passage, and somebody will say, "Okay. What does this mean to you?" All of a sudden people start saying all kinds of different things that this passage means to them.

Bob will say, "Well, I think this chapter means I need to go hiking with my son more, just like Abraham went hiking in the mountains with Isaac."

"Okay, Bob. Anybody else got something this passage means?"

And Joe says, "Well, I think it's clear from this passage that it's okay to sacrifice animals, which means no one should be a vegetarian."

… To which Joe's wife Mary, a vegetarian, replies, "Well, that's not what this passage means to me. Maybe this passage means I need to sacrifice you, Joe."

And so when we start a Bible study with the question, "What does this passage mean to me?" the conversation quickly congeals into a pool of ignorance, where a group of people find themselves sitting around, sharing what they don't know about the Bible. And the same thing can happen in our personal Bible study. This is where I want to remind you that the first question we ask is not, "What does this passage mean to me?" Instead, we're after, "What does the Holy Spirit mean in this passage?" period. Quite frankly, I don't care what the passage means to you, and I don't care what the passage means to me. I care what the passage means according to the Holy Spirit's inspiration of it.

You say, "Well, don't you know, David, that the Bible means different things to different people?" No. That's "application," which we'll get to in a minute. There's no question that the Bible applies to our lives in different ways. But it is not open to us attaching all kinds of different meanings to it. God has given us this Word, and it has a meaning in it, and our goal in Bible study is to understand the meaning of a passage—what the Holy Spirit meant when he gave us Genesis 22.

So this means we're not looking for what feels right to us. We're not going to twist the Bible to make it fit our tastes and, in the process, ignore God's truth. It means we're not looking for what's best for our lives so we can take Scripture and accommodate it to our lives. That's a self-centered, arrogant way to study the Bible. It misses the whole point. We're not taking some super-spiritual approach where we're looking for a hidden meaning in every chapter that nobody else has ever discovered before. People have been studying this book for a couple thousand years—there's nothing new that's coming to the table.

Our goal in Bible study is to find out what the Holy Spirit has said for thousands of years in a passage of Scripture because that's the same thing he is saying to us now. Which means we need to examine the text. It's like we're detectives. We're trying to discover as much as possible in the text, which means we're going to look, and we're going to observe—we're going to write down what we see. We're going to look at details.

We're going to ask questions—who, what, when, where, why? Who wrote this book? Who's reading this chapter originally? Who are the main characters here? Where is all this taking place? When is all this taking place? What's the sequence of events? What's happening in the text? What's wrong in the picture? What's the author communicating? Why is the author communicating that? Why is he communicating it this way or that way?

What is happening in this passage? What words, phrases, or ideas seem particularly important?
So you'll see here in your notes a summary of those kinds of questions. What's happening in the passage? What words, phrases or ideas seem particularly important? We want to see the details of the passage, and most of the time we read the Bible so quickly that we skip over this altogether. We're not driving through a fast-food restaurant here. We're sitting down for a meal. So we need to have patience with the text and ponder over it, to look at words and phrases and verses, and then think about it. Spend time thinking about it.

I think about when Heather and I were just getting to know each other and she'd write me a letter, before we got married. And I would just take every word in that letter and dissect it. "What does she mean by this? She said she likes me. Likes me as friend or likes as more than a friend? She said she's praying for me. Well, is that like praying for me like she prays for anybody, or like she's praying for her future husband … she's praying for me? She put a smiley face at the end. Does she always do that or is that something special for me?"

This is what we're doing in Bible study. We're looking at every little detail and saying, "Okay, what is ...?" We really want to get in the shoes of the writer, the reader, the people in the text. We want to see the sites, we want to smell the smells, we want to experience the emotions. So we want to make observations. That's what that first question is after, making observations.

And then once we've made observations of what the Bible is saying, then that can lead us to interpretation of what the Bible means. This is when we step back and consider what truth here is God communicating about himself and about us, not just to this people at this time, but all people of all time.

What does this text teach you about the gospel?
So in your notes there, in the "Simple Guide to Personal Worship," there's the question: What does this text teach you about the gospel? Which is, I think, a helpful way—I hope a helpful way—to help you think about timeless truth that is in the text. So think about the threads of the gospel: What does this text teach us about God? What does this text teach us about man? What does this text teach us about who Jesus is and why we need Him?

You say, "Well, this is an Old Testament text. I don't see Jesus mentioned anywhere here." But remember, Jesus is the hero at the center of this entire Book. In Luke chapter 24, he walked on that road to Emmaus with those men, and the Bible says, *"… beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself"* (Luke 24:27). All the Scripture centers around Christ. So we ask, in any text, "What does this text help us know about Jesus, who he is, and why we need him?"

The necessity of faith—what does this text teach us about trusting and following Jesus?

The urgency of eternity—does this text teach us anything about the hope of heaven or the horror of hell?

Now, it's not that every single text answers every single one of those questions specifically, but I would argue most texts address most, if not all, of those questions. These are questions that are intended to get us thinking in our Bible study, "Okay, I've observed what the text is saying, what it said to those who were of that time. Now, what does this text mean—not just to me, not just to this person or that person—what does this text mean to all people of all time?"

So here's what I want us to do. Audience participation time. No spectators here. I want you to take the next few minutes—about five minutes—and answer these questions under "Examine." So you've got space in your notes, and you can do this alone, just like you would on tomorrow morning, sitting alone with the Word and some questions to think through. Or if you like, you can do this with a couple of people around you or somebody around you; that's fine too. So for the next five minutes, unpack these questions.

Start with observation. Just write down, what's happening in this passage—write words, phrases, ideas that seem particularly important. So observing—you're looking for details. What's sticking out here when it comes to the details in the passage? And then, based on that—so that's why there's an order here—that's why we then begin to ask, "Okay, what does this mean? What does this text teach us about God, man, who Jesus is, and why we need him—trusting and following? Anything there about the hope of heaven or the horror of hell?" So five minutes, I want to encourage you to spend time just writing down some observations and interpretation, answering those questions there. And then we'll move on from there. So, go!

[NOTE: The congregation takes time on their own to make observations and discover meaning in Genesis 22, writing down their findings.]

Alright, let's bring this back together. I know that's a short amount of time, but that's maybe even an illustration of the fact that there's so much if we'll take the time; there's so much to be unearthed—to be discovered and realized here. Let's think about these questions together—and this will be brief; it will not do justice to this text. But what's happening in this passage? What words, phrases, and ideas seem particularly important? Remember—and this is one of the values of reading through the Bible—Genesis 22 doesn't

just come on the pages of Scripture in isolation. There's lead-up; I mean even the first few words, *"After these things God tested Abraham …"*

So what are "these things"? Well, certainly there's a story right before this, so we think about what's led to this point. We think about Sarah, a 90-year-old woman who had, in 90 years, not born one son to Abraham. The agony over that! And God's promise over and over and over again to Abraham and Sarah? They would have a son together. But nothing happened. He's 100 years old by then. They get this promise that the next year they're going to have a baby, a son, and Sarah laughs. You can't blame her. I mean, she's 90, he's 100. And yet God, in miraculous mercy, provides a son—Isaac, the child of promise, whom God had promised to them.

Now *"after these things…"* When you realize that the build-up leading to that, and then you get to verse 2 and God says, *"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you,"* what is that about? Did God really just tell Abraham to slay the son of promise? And the emphasis there is almost agonizing. *"Your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love…"*

When we hear sermons on Genesis 22, we immediately jump to Abraham's faith, which is obviously a part of this passage—a significant part of this passage. But this isn't just about a father. This is about a son, isn't it? Maybe even primarily about a son. Did you see it? Did you see how many times son was mentioned over and over and over and over again? Maybe you should circle it, every time you see the word "son," here in Genesis 22.

Start in verse 2 there, he said, *"Take your son ..."* So circle it there. *"Your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah."* Verse 3, *"So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and*—not just Isaac—*his son Isaac."* We know it's his son, but he says it. Verse 6, *"Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac, his son."* Verse 7, *"Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'My father!' And he said, 'Here I am ..."*—not just *"here I am*" period like he said earlier and says later—"*Here am I, my son."*

Go down to verse 8. *"Abraham said, 'God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.'"* Verse 9 and 10, *"When they came to the place of which God had told him ..."* This is where the climax of the story is building to. Things just slow down here. *"Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son."*

You get down to verse 12. God speaks through this angel, *"Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."* When you get down to verse 16 and 17, God says, *"By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you ..."* You see, eleven different circles you should have there in your Bible. There are eleven times in sixteen verses—fifteen in a row there—that "son" is mentioned. Three of those times it stresses, *"…your only son."*

So this is clearly a picture of a son, a son of promise, potentially being slain. But then there's the repetition of another phrase. You see "your son, your only son" three times. There's another repetition of a phrase three times. Did you notice it? Verse eight, *"God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering."* Then down in verse 14, twice, *"Abraham called the name of that place, 'The LORD will provide'; as it is said to this day, 'On the*

mount of the LORD it shall be provided.'" The Lord will provide. Then, based on God's provision of a sacrifice, God's promises to Abraham just start to flow.

So this is what's happening in the text. Now, we're starting to realize this is not about taking your son hiking or whether or not to be vegetarian. This is much more important. So we're observing these things, then we step back, and we ask the question, "Okay, what does this text teach about the gospel?"

So <u>what does this text teach us about God?</u> And immediately we've seen it. We feel the tension of the text. Why would a loving God command the slaying of an only son? And the answer is clear: to show that he provides. God commands the slaying of a son, Isaac, who is by the way the seed of the people of Israel—who'd be reading this—in order to show Isaac and the people of Israel that he provides for their salvation.

Isaac is saved—he doesn't die. Why? Because God provides a ram in the thicket. Don't miss the language of verse 13, to be sacrificed as a burnt offering *"instead of"* Isaac … in the place of Isaac. God takes a substitute and puts him on the altar in order to save Isaac from death, so that Isaac can live. God commands the slaying of a son to show his faithfulness to save his people. God provides, faithful to His promise.

<u>What does this text teach us about man?</u> Well, certainly, man is in need of God's provision. Where would Abraham and Isaac be without God's provision, without God's promises? Be honest. Put yourself in the shoes of this precious son, asking (paraphrased), "Dad, we've got the fire and we've got the wood. But where's the lamb? Where's the sacrifice?" And from all we know, Abraham doesn't know how all this is going to unfold, but he knows that God will provide. Doesn't that shed light on us? There are just all kinds of circumstances and situations we find ourselves in. We see here the limited perspective of man. God knows how all of this is going to work. We don't always know how all of this is going to work out.

But back to the main point. Man, here—clearly pictured in this text—is in need of the mercy of God, of the provision of God … which obviously leads to the sufficiency of Christ. <u>What does this text teach us about who Jesus is and why we need Him?</u>

Now, I want to be clear here. I've obviously chosen a passage that presents a pretty clear connection to Christ. I'm not saying it's always this easy—this clear. In the days to come maybe I'll take one obscure passage of Scripture, and we'll do this together and hopefully see some of these truths even there.

But don't miss the picture here. God is commanding the slaying of a son, an only son, to show that He provides for their salvation.

After this point in Scripture you never ever see God again asking for the sacrifice of a son—until you get to a well-known verse like John 3:16, and it says that *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son..."* And this is where you and I enter into the picture and we realize it's not just ultimately about Isaac being on an altar; it's about you and I being under the knife of God's wrath, due every single one of us in this room in our sin, deserving of death—you, me—and God, in his mercy, provides a substitute to take our place on that altar. And this substitute is not a ram in a thicket. This substitute is his one and only Son.

Non-Christian here today, we invite you to see the love of God for you. Though you, just like every one of us in this room, have sinned against God—you've turned away from God's ways to your own way, and you deserve judgment from God—God has made a way for you to come out from under his judgment. He has sent his Son, his only Son, to pay the price

for our sin as a sacrifice for our sin. He has died in our place so that we could come out from under the knife of God's holy wrath and live forever.

You say, "How can I receive that salvation?" It leads to the next question: What does this text teach us about trusting and following Jesus? And the answer, all over Genesis 22, is faith. By faith. It's what we've read about leading up to this in Genesis. Remember Genesis 15:6, *"And he* (Abraham) *believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness."* Because he believed God. In the very beginning he sets out with his son, believing God. Believing God every step of this journey. This is it.

So, non-Christian, this is not the Bible saying, "Okay, so you've sinned against God. So here's a list of things you need to do—things you need to make right—in order to get to God." This is the Bible saying, "Believe in God's love for you." This is the Bible saying, "Trust in God's provision for you, on your behalf." And do not be mistaken, non-Christian and Christian alike: This is not just faith in some mere intellectual adherence, saying, "Okay, I'll kind of believe that in my head." This is faith that transforms head, heart, and life. This is faith that leads to radical obedience. This is faith that leads Abraham to do what he's doing in this passage … because he trusts God. He's doing what may not make sense at all—to him or the world around him—but he trusts God and it leads, inevitably, to obedient action.

Trusting. Following. You see, all over this text don't you, a quiet submissiveness? Abraham before God. Even Isaac before Abraham. We don't get all the emotions. You've got a son who's quietly saying, "Where's the lamb?" Abraham responds; and then you've got a son being put on an altar. We don't know exactly what that scene must have been like, as Abraham is tying up his son on an altar of sacrifice. We can only imagine.

But the text gives us this picture—don't miss it—of Abraham taking wood that will fuel the fire of sacrifice and putting it on Isaac's back to carry it. We can't help but think about God, fast-forwarding to Jesus. As Jesus goes to the cross, he is carrying it on his own back. And he says to his followers around him (paraphrased), "If you're going to follow me, you must deny yourself and take up your cross" (Luke 9:23). This picture of submissiveness is all over this text. To trust—to follow—Jesus means to put the blank check on the table, and to say, "My life is yours; my family is yours; my future is yours."

What does all that teach us about the hope of heaven and the horror of hell? Obviously, heaven is not mentioned here; and hell is not mentioned here. But when I'm studying Scripture, I'm asking the question, "Does this passage shed any light on what it means to have an eternal perspective of life on this earth?" And I think about this text—the promise that God gave Abraham in the end, a promise that would far outlive Abraham's time on earth—and I realize that when you trust in God, you are trusting in a God whose promises never fail. And by "never," I mean never. Never fail. You're part of an eternal plan that is marked by everlasting promises, and that changes your perspective of life today.

So examine. I'm not saying that you wrote down the exact same things that I may have written down there. Maybe some of those things you had, maybe some of those things you didn't. Maybe you had other things that I didn't mention here. There's treasure to be found. And again, those are a few brief comments on a glorious passage of Scripture. But on a whole, I hope it becomes clear. This is what the text means: God provides for the salvation of his people, his slaying the sacrifice of a Son eventually to come in Christ—a lamb here … a ram in the thicket—and then, the Lamb without blemish or defect—his only Son—to come in the future.

Apply

So how does the meaning of that text then transform my life today? And we begin to ask questions like these that are in your notes:

What sins do I need to repent of or avoid? What truths do I need to believe? What commands do I need to obey in my life? What do I need to give up, stop doing, start doing, or continue doing? What principles need to change the way I think, speak, and act? How will I implement that change? What relationships do I need to establish, strengthen, or change?

So we don't want to just hear the Word and so deceive ourselves, because the goal is not more Bible information as a result of reading the Bible. The goal is total transformation of our hearts and our minds and our lives. We've got to ask the question, "By the power of God's Spirit, what can I do today to apply God's Word to my life?"

Now, I want to help you think through these questions, but let me give you an opportunity first. Do one more audience participation time. Let me invite you to take just a couple minutes right now to do this on your own—so don't do this with somebody else. Think through those questions in light of this text, and write out any responses.

It doesn't mean you have to think, "I've got to fill out answers to all these questions." But think through: Is there any sin here, in reading this text, that the Lord has uncovered in my own life that I need to repent of or avoid? Any truths I need to believe? Maybe something I've already believed, but the Lord is just more firmly planting my feet on that foundation? Commands I need to obey? Principles that need to change the way I think, speak, and/or act? How am I to implement that change? Relationships I need to establish, strengthen, or change? So what can I do today to apply God's Word—this Word—to my life? So spend a few minutes on that, and then I'll bring it back together to close this out.

[NOTE: The congregation spends a few minutes writing out different ways that the Lord is leading them to apply the truths they have seen in Genesis 22.]

Feel free to keep writing. Again, we have insufficient time, I know. One of the things I love, even about preaching—every Sunday, preaching the Word and saying, "This is what the Word means…"—is that the Spirit of God takes that meaning, takes that Word, and just applies it to different situations and different circumstances all around the room in wonderfully creative and powerful ways. When I think about us, as a church, reading through the Bible every single day, all reading the same text, but the way meanings of those texts are applied by the Spirit of God, just landing in different places in our lives … it's just glorious to think about.

With these questions and this chapter 22, ask "What sins do I need to repent of and/or avoid?" Spend time meditating here and pondering here. I know, in my own life, of numerous ways that I'm evidencing a lack of trust in God that I need to repent of. It's our unbelief—truths that I need to believe about God as Provider. Think about truths about the promises of God that he's given to us. We need to trust. In this circumstance and that circumstance, amidst confusion, amidst heartache, amidst questions that we have … trust God's promises.

And think about commands we need to obey. I put myself in Abraham's shoes: God commands me to take my son and sacrifice him … would I obey? I immediately think about things in my life that God's telling me to do or stop doing. I need to obey in these areas.

I was looking, this morning, on the front of the worship guide. J.D. Payne, our Pastor of Church Multiplication, wrote this excerpt on what he's looking forward to in 2014, and he shares some of the follow-up from a few months ago, when we had that day where we dove into Romans and encouraged one another to think about who is the Lord raising up from among us to go mid-term—either to North America to engage unreached people groups or among the nations outside of North America to engage unreached people groups—and several people stood up. So how is the follow-through coming from that, those of you who stood up? Or maybe is the Lord now calling some of you? I read this: 20 brothers and sisters right now from our faith family are considering leaving Birmingham in the next 12-18 months. Church planting teams are developing and praying about moving to other cities to make disciples among Indian Hindus in metro New York … so there are families that are praying right now: "Lord, we believe you're leading us to move to New York to work among Indian Hindus." Others are doing the same with Arab Muslims in Detroit, Afghans in metro San Francisco, Iranians in Toronto, Somalis in Seattle. So this is happening all across this room.

And there's this information there, in the last paragraph, for if you want to be a part of one of those teams or talk with them about their future plans in these cities or discuss the possibility of developing a team to reach a different people group. We're reading this text about God calling Abraham to do something that he never could have imagined doing, and in the end, seeing that God's doing this, ultimately, for God's blessing to go to the nations. So as I read about these teams this morning, I'm thinking, "Lord, we're to call out some people today to join these teams" … to put the blank check on the table and see if the Lord's leading any of you to join these teams or to find out more information about them … if he's calling you to obey, if that's even a possibility.

Ask yourself, "What principles need to change the way I think, speak, and/or act, and how will I implement that change? You think about this principle from the text: when God calls us to a step of obedience, he will be faithful to provide for us as we go. So, start thinking, "Well, what is God calling me to do? This is going to be really hard." It comes right in, the principle from the text: you can trust God. If you can trust him to provide for your eternal salvation, you can trust him to provide for your everyday needs. Ask, "What relationships do I need to establish, strengthen, and/or change? By the power of God's Spirit, what can I do today to apply God's Word to my life?"

And let me just add something here, and this is in the "Simple Guide to Personal Worship." When you've studied the Word, I want to encourage you to make part of your application sharing what you've studied with somebody else. So maybe it's your roommate, maybe it's your spouse, maybe it's a child or your children, maybe it's a co-worker, maybe it's a friend, maybe it's your small group. But when you finish studying the Word, stop, and say to the Lord, "I know that this was not intended just for me. It's not intended to stop with me. Your Word is intended to spread through me. So who do you want me to share this with? How can I share this with somebody?" That'll do a lot, both for accountability to what the Lord is telling you to do, and for encouraging others in their faith—becoming a Word-saturated community … people. So let me encourage you to make that a question you ask. "Who do I share this with?" And then do it. Don't keep this Word to yourself.

Pray

All that leads us to pray—and this is what we spent time talking about specifically a few weeks ago—to let the text, to let the Word, prompt you to praise and worship God as provider. To repent of ways that you need to turn from your sin and yourself and trust in him. To ask, to intercede. We talked about spontaneous things—there may be things in the text that provoke you to pray for your life, for others' lives, for people in your life, or for things going on in the world; and then have intentional time when you're praying specifically for different things in your life and other people's lives. And all that leads you to yield. When you read Genesis 22, you come away with this phrase resounding—another one of those phrases that's repeated—"*Here I am*. Here I am. Here I am. Lord, here I am. My life is yours. So use me for your glory. Help me to trust in you." So we yield our lives to Him.

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